

During the latter part of the twelfth century ecclesiastical lawgivers and lawyers gradually established the principle that the canons of the cathedral chapter constituted the sole electoral body competent to elect a bishop. As for the weight of votes, Peltzer asserts (p. 29) that canon 3 of the Third Lateran Council (1179) provided that elections in individual dioceses should be decided by the “greater and wiser part” of the cathedral chapter. Alas, that canon says nothing of the sort. The first canon of the council, which deals with papal elections, however, does sanction use of the “greater and wiser part” rule in ecclesiastical elections other than those to the chair of St. Peter. This canon (later incorporated in the *Liber extra*) is presumably what Peltzer had in mind. The notion that the votes cast by “wiser” (*sanior*) electors were so important in determining a valid election that they might prevail even if they happened to constitute a minority had a long history in ecclesiastical elections, going back at least to the provisions for the election of an abbot in chapter 64 of the sixth-century *Rule of St. Benedict*. It found its way into Gratian’s *Decretum* (distinction 61, chapter 14) and into several canons of the *Liber extra*’s title on electoral law (1.6.6, 19, 35, 57).

By the beginning of the pontificate of Innocent III some basic elements of canonical election law had already become established. A series of appeals to the popes produced rulings that earlier practices, which had permitted neighboring bishops, other *viri religiosi*, local barons, and even monarchs to advise the chapter during elections, were unlawful. Rulers still enjoyed the right to authorize a chapter to proceed with an election, but they were no longer consulted during the electoral process. Innocent III and his immediate successors affirmed and amplified these developments.

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PARVANEH POURSHARIATI, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*. Reprinted ed. London and New York: I. B. Tauris, in association with the Iran Heritage Foundation, 2009. Pp. xiv, 537; black-and-white figures and tables. \$95. First published in 2008.
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This work represents a bold and detailed contribution to the study of Iran in late antiquity, a region hitherto relatively neglected, as the author notes (pp. 1, 453). In both the introduction and the conclusion Pourshariati clearly exposes the overarching themes of the study, which may be summarized as follows. First, and most importantly, the Sasanian rulers never succeeded in centralizing power in their kingdom, even in the sixth century: from the very start of Sasanian rule in the early third century, the Parthian dynasties played a fundamental role, monopolizing offices of the highest rank. The Sasanian kings might play off the Parthian families against one another, but they were never able to break their power, which remained particularly strong in the northern and eastern regions of Iran. Furthermore, when the consensus that had marked Sasanian rule broke down in the sixth and seventh centuries, it was the Sasanian kings themselves who suffered: the uprising of Bahram Chobin, for instance, was an aspect of this breakdown (pp. 122–30). Second, the Parthian dynasties made their peace with the invading Arabs and continued to exercise power in Iran well into the eighth century (pp. 5, 462). Third, Pourshariati proposes an important revision of the chronology of the Arab conquest of Iran, arguing on the basis of Iranian sources that the Hegira dating of the Islamic sources is unreliable. She persuasively argues for bringing forward the conquest of Iran to the years following 628, that is, just as Khusro II was succumbing to Heraclius’s invasion (chap. 3). Fourth, Pourshariati offers a detailed investigation of religion in Iran both before and after the Arab conquest, stressing the diversity within the kingdom, reflecting the differing Zoroastrian traditions of Persians and Parthians. In particular, she notes the enduring popularity of Mihr (Mithra) worship in the north and east of Iran,

and thus she is able to bring out the religious dimensions of uprisings like those of Bahram Chobin (pp. 397–414) and of Sunbad in the mid-eighth century (pp. 437–51).

Pourshariati propounds her arguments on the basis of a meticulous study of the Iranian sources, in particular the traditions that go back to the Sasanian *Book of Kings*, the *X^wadāy-Nāmag*, which are handed down both in the *Shāhnāma* of Ferdowsī (Firdausi) and in Arabic histories, such as those of Tabari, Balʿami, and Thaʿalibi (pp. 10–18). In chapter 4 Pourshariati exploits a local source, the *Tārīkh-i Tabaristān* of Ibn Isfandiār, when dealing in detail with events in Tabaristan. Where possible, she brings sigillographic evidence to bear, making good use of recent discoveries in the field; the Armenian historian Pseudo-Sebeos is often cited and, on occasion, Byzantine authors. Although Pourshariati is at pains to defend the accuracy of Ferdowsī and the other late sources that she uses, insisting rightly that, despite the efforts of the Sasanians, they also preserved traditions developed by the Parthian dynasties (pp. 10, 459–61), issues of accuracy nevertheless arise: just as the Sasanians sought to highlight their own accomplishments in their *Book of Kings*, so, too, the Parthians inserted episodes that glorified themselves. Pourshariati, for instance, seems to take at face value the implausible campaign of Sukhrā narrated in Tabari in which he avenged the defeat and death of King Peroz at the hands of the Hephthalites in 484 (pp. 76–77), since she refers to his victory as a “heroic feat.” Arthur Christensen, in *L’Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen, 1944), p. 296, long ago rightly dismissed this tradition. Pourshariati likewise accepts (p. 174) Ferdowsī’s report that Khusro II married a daughter of the Byzantine emperor Maurice (582–602) called Maryam (Maria), although this is generally rejected as a legend by modern scholars, for example, by C. E. Bosworth in his translation of and commentary on Tabari (New York, 1999), p. 312 n. 729, a work to which Pourshariati often refers.

Pourshariati’s book is thus not without methodological problems: she is right to draw attention to the unjustly neglected Parthian sagas that have survived, but they, too, must be subjected to skeptical scrutiny. She is a keen prosopographer, offering numerous identifications of people referred to in different sources by very different names, as well as generally ascribing them to one of the seven Parthian dynasties. Of interest to Byzantinists will be her contention that Shahravaz and Farrukhan are to be distinguished, the latter of whom corresponds to Zād Farrukh in Ferdowsī and Khorokh Hormizd, prince of the Medes, in Pseudo-Sebeos, who in turn was the father of Farrukhzād and Rustam, leading players in the downfall of Khusro II and its aftermath (pp. 149–53). This painstaking work is extremely valuable, even if some of the identifications may end up being rejected. Pourshariati’s handling of non-Iranian sources is less assured, especially Byzantine authors such as Procopius, as seen in her referencing of them, sometimes just to a page number of an English translation (e.g., at p. 45 n. 200). Despite her complaints about the neglect of Iranian history in this period, she fails to take into account important relevant recent scholarship, such as Henning Boerm’s *Prokop und die Perser* (Stuttgart, 2007) or any of James Howard-Johnston’s many articles on Heraclius’s war against Persia. Her prose is hard going, containing too many errors of spelling, grammar, and syntax (e.g., “seize” for “cease” on p. 240); in some cases (e.g., use of the word “ethniconic” on p. 420), the sense is completely obscure. There are also too many quotations from modern sources when a footnote reference would suffice.

This is without doubt a very important and original book, which makes a significant contribution to many aspects of late-antique and early Islamic Iran. Scholars will spend many years digesting it, no doubt disagreeing with certain aspects of it, but it will surely remain a vital point of reference. Its only drawbacks are its dense structure—somewhat compensated for by numerous sections and subsections, as well as scrupulous cross-referencing and useful prosopographical tables and index—and its awkward prose style.

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